	Education Department Policy Document	
		Effective Date:
	Complaints Procedures for Schools	


Title : **Complaints Procedures for Schools**

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Approval Date : June 2015

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Originator :


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Originator: *Human Resources, ESF Centre*


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REVISION STATUS TABLE

Revision No	Effective Date	Summary of Revision	Reviewed		Approved	
			By	Date	By	Date
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POLICY DOCUMENT ANNUAL REVIEW

This Policy document is subject to an Annual Review by ESF that is formally documented to ensure its continuing suitability, adequacy and effectiveness. Areas subject to review include, but are not limited to, follow-up action from previous reviews, policy conformity, review of complaints, status of corrective and preventive actions, and improvements for the forthcoming year. ESF reserves the right to amend this Policy by notice following such review in circumstances in which it considers such change to be necessary or appropriate.

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COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR SCHOOLS

This model complaints procedure for schools has four stages:-

1. Initial Approach
2. Formal Complaint to Principal
3. Formal Complaint to Chairman of School Council
4. Review by ESF Centre

Stage 1 – INITIAL APPROACH

GUIDELINES

- The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally, often straight away by the class teacher, year head or Principal.
- Schools should aim to ensure that parents feel able to raise concerns with staff without undue formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing. There may be occasions when it is appropriate or helpful for someone to accompany or act on behalf of a parent.
- Parents may not be clear at first that they are making a complaint. They may wish to ask a question or express an opinion. A preliminary discussion with school staff will usually clarify the issue and help parents to decide whether they wish to take the matter further.
- A complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of services, facilities or activities, or actions or lack of action, by the School or its staff, affecting an individual or group.


The following are not complaints:

- **A general enquiry**
- **A request for a service**
- **A request for information or explanation of a policy or practice**
- **Matters for which there is a right of appeal or a legal remedy**
- Matters appropriate to be dealt with under other procedures
- Issues which staff wish to raise regarding employment issues.

In some instances, e.g. where English may not be a parent's mother tongue language, it may be appropriate for a parent to be accompanied by an "advocate" to ensure full understanding of the concerns being raised.

PROCEDURE

1. Parents should have an opportunity for informal discussion of their concerns with the appropriate member of staff. This discussion should aim to clarify the nature of parent's concern and assure them that the school wishes to hear about it. The discussion should also aim to clarify what kind of outcome the parent is seeking.
2. If the member of staff first contacted cannot deal with the matter immediately, s/he should make a firm arrangement to deal with it at a future date or refer the matter to

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the Principal or another appropriate member of staff. In either case a note of the name, date and contact details of the complainant should be taken. The first contact should check later to make sure the referral has been successful.

3. Principals should ensure that staff have guidelines about when to refer a matter.
4. If the concern relates to the Principal and the parent feels unable to raise it with the Principal they should be advised to contact ESF Centre.
5. The staff member/Principal dealing with the complaint should make sure that the complainant is clear about what will happen next (if anything). This should be put in writing if it seems the best way of making the next steps or outcome clear.
6. If no satisfactory solution has been found, the complainant should be informed about how they should proceed if they wish to take their complaint further. They should be informed of any advice and support that may be available to them.


Stage 2 – FORMAL COMPLAINT TO PRINCIPAL

GUIDELINES

- The Principal needs to determine who has responsibility for responding to a formal complaint, including the decision about his/her own involvement at various stages.
- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the action of the Principal, or the Principal has been very closely involved informally, the Chairman of School Council should carry out all the Stage Two procedures, with support if necessary from ESF Centre.


PROCEDURE

1. Parents who wish to pursue a formal complaint at Stage Two should be asked to put the complaint and their desired outcome in writing to the Principal. The Principal should acknowledge the complaint orally or in writing within three days of receipt giving a brief explanation of the complaints procedures and a target date for providing a response. Ideally, this should be within ten days. If it is not possible to deal with the matter in this time, the complainant should be informed of when it is likely to be concluded.
2. The Principal (or a designated member of staff) may offer an opportunity for the complainant to meet him/her. The complainant should, if she/he wishes, be allowed to be accompanied by a friend or relative who can speak on his/her behalf. Interpreting facilities should be made available if required.
3. If necessary, the Principal (or a designated member of staff) should interview any witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres around a student, the student should also be interviewed, normally with parent/guardian present. In some circumstances, this may not be possible or appropriate and a senior member of staff with whom the student feels comfortable should attend with

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him/her. If a member of staff is complained against, the needs of that person should be borne in mind. Advice may need to be sought from ESF Centre.

4. The Principal (or designated member of staff) should keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
5. Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Principal (or designated member of staff) should either write to the complainant or arrange a meeting to discuss or resolve the matter. This meeting should be followed up with a letter summarising the outcome of the meeting. The complainant should be advised in this letter that if they remain unhappy with the outcome, s/he may appeal to the Chairman of the School Council. The complainant should notify the School Council Chairman within two weeks of receiving the letter detailing the outcome of the complaint.

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Stage 3 – FORMAL COMPLAINT TO SCHOOL COUNCIL CHAIRMAN


PROCEDURE

1. Parents who wish to pursue a formal complaint at Stage Three should be invited to put the complaint and their desired outcome in writing to the Chairman of School Council. The Chair of School Council should acknowledge the complaint orally or in writing within three days of receipt giving a brief explanation of the complaints procedures and a target date for providing a response. Ideally, this should be within ten days. If it is not possible to deal with the matter in this time, the complainant should be informed of when it is likely to be concluded. Depending upon the circumstances, the Chairman may wish to convene a small group of Council members (no more than 3) to review the complaint and the school's response.
2. The Chairman of School Council may offer an opportunity for the complainant to meet him/her. The complainant should, if she/he wishes, be allowed to be accompanied by a friend or relative who can speak on his/her behalf. Interpreting facilities should be made available if required.
3. If necessary, the Chairman of School Council (or nominated alternates) should interview any witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres around a student, the student should also be interviewed, normally with parent/guardian present. In some circumstances, this may not be possible or appropriate and a senior member of staff with whom the student feels comfortable should attend with him/her. If a member of staff is complained against, the rights of that person should be borne in mind. Advice may need to be sought from ESF Centre.
4. The Chairman of School Council should keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
5. Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Chairman of School Council should either write to the complainant or arrange a meeting to discuss or resolve the matter. This meeting should be followed up with a letter summarising the outcome of the meeting. The complainant should be advised in this letter that if they remain unhappy with the outcome, s/he may seek a review by ESF Centre. The complainant should notify the Chief Executive Officer at ESF Centre within two weeks of receiving the letter detailing the outcome of the complaint.

Stage 4 – REVIEW AT ESF CENTRE

PROCEDURE

1. If the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution of his/her complaint, he/she may contact the Chief Executive's Office and an investigation of the process previously

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followed will be arranged. If the process is found to be thorough and to have considered all the evidence, then the outcome will not be changed.

RECORDING, REPORTING AND MONITORING OF COMPLAINTS

Complaints at Stage Two and Three should be logged in a Complaints Record (Appendix 1).


The following information is required to be completed within the Complaints Record:

- Date received
- Complainant's name
- Summary of the complaint
- Date of response. Where necessary, the date of an initial acknowledgement and the date of the final response should be recorded.
- Summary of the outcome (including date of withdrawal of the complaint, if appropriate) and of any recommendations arising.

Each School should submit its Complaints Record to the Director of Education at the end of each School term.

CONTACT

Any questions on these procedures may be directed to the Head of Student Support, ESF Centre.

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Appendix 1

ESF COMPLAINTS RECORD

Department _____

Complaint Number	Date Received	Date replied	Complainant details	Summary of the Complaint	Resolution and recommendations